

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS POLICY

Subject

Legislative Policy: Refugee Resettlement Programs

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Purpose

To establish the Board of Supervisors' legislative policy regarding issues related to refugee resettlement, and to provide guidance to the County's legislative representatives when advocating the County's interests to legislators, other elected officials and policy makers.

Background

The Refugee Act of 1980 provides permanent and systematic procedures for:

- Admitting refugees of national interest to the United States through uniform provisions; and
- Authorizing federal assistance to resettle and promote the self-sufficiency of those refugees who are admitted.

Persons that are authorized to receive Refugee Resettlement assistance include:

- Refugee or Asylee – a person who is fleeing his or her country of residence because of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion; and receives refugee status or is granted asylum.
- Victim of Trafficking – a child victim (under 18 years of age), who is eligible for services and designated by the federal government to be a victim of a severe form of trafficking (kidnap or coercion for the purpose of commercial sex induced by force, fraud or slavery).

Except for emergency situations, the Act intends that refugees be initially resettled in areas other than those already highly impacted by the presence of refugees – unless they are being reunited with family members. In response to disparities in resettlement, since 1983, San Diego County has been designated as an area highly impacted by refugees, qualifying the region for additional federal funding.

Congress emphasized, through the Act, that integration of refugees into the American culture and economy takes a reasonably short period of time – thereby restricting the duration of federal support:

- Refugee cash assistance limited to 8 months
- Refugee employment services limited to 60 months from date of arrival

The federal government has responsibility for funding and administering refugee assistance (cash and medical, employment, preventive health and matching grants). The

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State of California has given counties the flexibility to design and manage local refugee employment and refugee health programs.

However, the uncertainty of the availability of funding, as well as the complexity of the distribution of funding, impedes effective and efficient provision of services. Inadequate federal appropriations have resulted in reductions in cash and medical assistance, effectively shifting the financial responsibility for many refugees to states and counties. Limited federal resources for refugee programs have adversely affected the ability of local government to meet local needs.

Policy

The legislative policy of the Board of Supervisors regarding issues related to refugee resettlement is to:

Planning and Coordination

1. Support a federal planning process that produces a national refugee resettlement plan, in advance of future refugee arrivals, utilizing input from the states and local government.
2. Support coordination with all government and voluntary agencies to accomplish effective local refugee resettlement that is limited to family reunification cases.
3. Support limiting the annual admission of political refugees to the United States to the number of refugees allowed under the Refugee Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-212; 94 Stat. 102), not to exceed 50,000.

Funding

1. Support 100% federal reimbursement of expenses incurred by local governments and agencies engaged in the refugee resettlement efforts.
2. Support inclusion of time expired refugees, asylees, victims of trafficking, and secondary migrants in all funding formulas.
3. Support incentive funding for localities that successfully integrate refugees into the local economy, removing them from public assistance rolls.
4. Support distribution of funding based on the refugee's current residence rather than his or her point of initial resettlement.
5. Support the continued funding of targeted assistance and social services programs designed to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency among refugees in impacted areas.

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6. Oppose priority service, eligibility advantages, or higher benefit levels for refugees over similar assistance programs available to U.S. citizens.

Health and Education Services

1. Support health screening of newly arrived refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking to minimize communicable disease exposure identify conditions of intervention, and evaluate health barriers to employment.

2. Support increased federal appropriations for health, citizenship education for elderly refugees, and bi-lingual services for local institutions/government (e.g., school districts, hospitals, and police departments) impacted by increases in refugees.

3. Support expansion of funding for mental health programs, family support services and community development.

Employment Services

1. Support the promotion of early employment, including Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL)/English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) programs and short-term employment training.

2. Support the promotion of improved corporate relationships to facilitate refugee employment opportunities in private industry.

3. Support proposals that would avoid duplication of refugee services and encourage maximum coordination between agencies that serve the refugee population.

4. Support efforts to maximize the use of voluntary non-profit organizations, mutual assistance associations, and other agencies to achieve the goal of economic self-sufficiency and effective resettlement for refugees residing in San Diego County.

5. Support the evaluation of federal refugee projects for cost effectiveness.

Responsible Departments

Health and Human Services Agency

Office of Strategy and Intergovernmental Affairs

Sunset Date

This policy will be reviewed for continuance by 12-31-11.

References

Board Action 3-16-77 (16)

Board Action 7-15-81 (6)

Board Action 12-11-84 (21)

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Board Action 3-1-88 (106)
Board Action 6-18-95
Board Action 1-9-96 (4)
Board Action 10-31-06 (14)